

**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INVESTIGATIONS AND OVERSIGHT**

“EPA Library Closures: Better Access for a Broader Audience?”

March 13, 2007

STATEMENT OF REP. PAUL BROUN (R-GA)

I want to thank the Chairman for holding this hearing and welcome our witnesses here today.

EPA’s ability to protect public health and the environment is contingent on timely access to accurate information. The existing library infrastructure plays a major role in providing that information to not only EPA, but also the general public.

While the manner in which EPA scientists, outside scholars, advocacy groups, and litigators receive information has changed over the last 20 years, the importance of that information has not. Modern information technology has given access to many more users than traditional brick and mortar libraries, but we must be cautious in how we transition to new data formats.

One of the challenges EPA faces is access. Continuous, uninterrupted, and timely access to EPA-unique documents by both EPA scientists and private citizens is critical to executing EPA’s charter of protecting the environment and the public. Additionally, access to information that is not unique to EPA such as journals, commercially available information, and other reference materials are still vitally important to EPA scientists and the general public. Even though access to this information can be obtained through other means such as interlibrary loan or internet accessed databases, rarely is it as timely or as efficient as having it onsite.

Another challenge EPA must address is how to keep professional research support staff and librarians involved in the process. These key professionals will still be required to help users navigate the ever-growing collections of data, perhaps even more so in our new digital age.

How to manage EPA’s library infrastructure investment and balance the competing concerns of access and efficiency is no easy task. EPA began the process of transitioning to a more modern system in 2003 by doing all the right things. They conducted a cost benefit analysis and reviewed the program no less than four times between 2004 and 2006. Unfortunately, it doesn’t seem as though EPA learned from these reviews, or

consulted with any outside experts such as the American Library Association (ALA), internal unions, or outside users. Rather than carefully and methodically implementing a transition, they instead closed libraries in an abrupt attempt at cost savings. Earlier EPA reviews had pointed to the cost effectiveness of the library infrastructure, but those reviews apparently did not influence their decision.

While EPA's motivation to modernize the way it provides information to its employees and the general public should be commended, we in Congress have the responsibility to ensure that the process is done in a prudent manner that does not adversely impact the end-users.

I want to commend GAO for their excellent work on the topic. I look forward to the witness's testimony today and pledge to work with EPA to make certain that any changes to the library system do not negatively impact end-users that are tasked with protecting our environment and public health.

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I yield back my time.

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